Key Questions for the Public Information Officer

# PURPOSE

*This list provides a quick review of important points to consider for public communication during an advisory.*

# DIRECTIONS

*Compare available public communication materials available to this list. Provide this list to other water systems or organizations responding to an advisory. Use this list when working with the media.*

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As a public information officer, consider the following before releasing information to the media:

1. **Ability**— Do you have the appropriate information on the subject?
2. **Competency**— Are you qualified to discuss the topic with the news media? If you are not the expert, find out who the expert is and arrange to have him or her brief the media.
3. **Authority**— Do you have jurisdiction over the issue? It’s always advisable to stay in close contact with upper management to coordinate your response.
4. **Security**— Is the information classified? The security limitation is extremely important because of the need to safeguard classified and operationally sensitive information.
5. **Accuracy**— Is the information accurate? Public information officers have an obligation to provide accurate, factual information and to avoid speculation.
6. **Propriety**— Is the information appropriate to the situation? Ensure that information released displays sensitivity and dignity. For example, do not release photographs that could distress individuals or their family members.
7. **Policy**— Do the policies of your organization permit release of this information?

***Adapted from: Mobley, J, Tatham EL, Reinhart K, Tatham C. Strategic Communication Planning: A Guide for Water Utilities. Denver, CO: Water Research Foundation; 2006.***